

Panel 10: Testimonial Writing Across the Americas

Moderator: Patrick D. M. Taylor

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Milk Poems and Blood Poems: Autobiographical Poetry and the New Nicaraguan Woman

In 1967, *La Prensa Literaria*, Nicaragua's most highly regarded literary magazine, laments that Nicaragua is "overpopulated" by "poetesses" who outnumber male poets 1,000 to 700 in the capital alone. Nicaraguan women were virtually invisible in their nation's literary history until the future of a revolutionary "new Nicaragua" was being imagined by an idealist, nationalist, socialist, but not always feminist, Sandinista movement. Through the literary magazines founded by the Sandinista National Liberation Front, these spokeswomen and activists published transformative autobiographical poetry chronicling the aesthetic, social, and political birth of the "new woman" in Nicaragua. This poetry introduced a new voice – that of a self-reflective revolutionary womanhood. The focus of this paper is the construction Sandinista womanhood through its autobiographical depiction in a full range of embodied self-expression. This paper will examine the poetry of six influential guerilla poets of the revolution – Daisy Zamora, Gioconda Belli, Yolanda Blanco, Michele Najlis, Vidaluz Meneses, and Rosario Murillo, wife of Sandinista leader and president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega – all of whom vocalize the emergence of the "New Nicaraguan Woman" as experienced in the physical body.

Unapologetically presented in cycles of menstruation, states of pregnancy, labor of childbirth, and climaxes of erotic ecstasy, these poets challenge the bourgeois chivalry of the ruling class for which graphic references to the female body are considered indecent. Depicted as well in acts of volunteerism, advocacy, and armed rebellion, these poets reveal bodies in the act of creating the New Nicaragua and defy the overshadowing masculinist content typical of testimonial poetry dedicated to the insurrection of macho rebel leaders.

Poemas de Leche y Poemas de Sangre: Poesía Autobiográfica y la Nueva Mujer Nicaragüense

En 1967, *La Prensa Literaria*, la revista literario más estimado de Nicaragua, lamenta que Nicaragua es "superpobaldo" por "poetistas" que superan a poetas masculinos 1.000 a 700 en la capital solamente. Mujeres Nicaragüense eran prácticamente invisibles en la historia de la literatura de su nación hasta que el futuro de un revolucionario "nueva Nicaragua" fue imaginado por un idealista, nacionalista, socialista, pero no siempre feminista, movimiento de Sandinista. A través de las

revistas literarias fundadas por el Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, estos portavoces y activistas publicaron poesía autobiográfica transformadora que relata el nacimiento de la estética, social, y político de la "nueva mujer" en Nicaragua. Esta poesía presentó una nueva voz - la de una mujer revolucionaria auto-reflexiva. El enfoque de este trabajo es la construcción de la vida como mujer Sandinista a través de su representación autobiográfica en una amplia gama de expresión encarnada. Este ensayo examinará la poesía de seis influyentes poetas guerrilleras de la revolución - Daisy Zamora, Gioconda Belli, Yolanda Blanco, Michele Najlis, Vidaluz Meneses y Rosario Murillo, esposa del líder Sandinista y Presidente de Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega - que vocalizan el surgimiento de la "nueva mujer nicaragüense" como experiencia en el cuerpo físico. Presentado sin disculpas en ciclos de menstruación, estados de embarazo y parto, y en clímax del éxtasis erótico, estos poetas impugna la caballería burguesa de la clase dominante para que referencias gráficas al cuerpo femenino se consideraron indecentes. Representado así en actos de voluntariado, la abogacía, y la rebelión armada, estos poetas revelan cuerpos en el acto de la creación de la nueva Nicaragua y desafían contenido ofuscador masculinista típico de la poesía testimonial dedicada a la insurrección de los dirigentes rebeldes macho.

Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle is an Associate Professor of English at The College of New Jersey. She specializes in 20th-century Multiethnic and Inter-American literature and autobiographical studies with specific interest in narratives of exile, immigration, and dictatorship throughout the Latin American diaspora. Her recent publications include "Julia Alvarez and the Autobiographical Antojito" in Emily Hipchen and Rebecca Harrison's *Inhabiting La Patria: Identity, Agency, and Antojito in the Work of Julia Alvarez*, "'Becoming a Butterfly': Julia Alvarez's In the Time of the Butterflies as Autoethnography," (*a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*), "'The Place My Grandmother Made': Diaspora Genealogy in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*," forthcoming in *Life Writing Annual*, and "'Distinguished Ladies' and the Doctrine of Womanhood: Auto-surveillance and Auto-performance in Diamela Eltit's *E. Luminata*," forthcoming in *The Journal of European Life Writing*. She is currently at work on a manuscript about Latin American women's autobiographical writing and dictatorship. The work shared in this panel is a selection from a book chapter on autobiographical innovations within the Sandinista movement.